

Congress gets first briefings on Iran sales

Casey, Poindexter fail to quell anger on Capitol Hill

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WASHINGTON — Congress opened inquiries yesterday into the U.S. role in arms shipments to Iran, but administration officials failed to put out a growing firestorm of legislative opposition to the operation, which one House leader said involved several countries in addition to the United States and Israel.

Members of the House and Senate intelligence committees received briefings on Capitol Hill from William Casey, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and at the White House from Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter, the president's national security adviser. Those sessions were the first full-scale private briefings of the committees, whose members remain angry that they were kept in the dark for at least 18 months on the operation.

Even after the lengthy meetings, "there are more questions than there are answers," according to Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., vice-chairman of the Senate intelligence panel.

House Majority Leader Jim Wright, D-Texas, said afterward that

Iran paid at least \$12 million for shipments of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile components shipped under U.S. auspices.

Contrary to some published reports that Israel alone had arranged shipments of 2,008 anti-tank missiles, Mr. Wright said yesterday that other countries were involved in some of those shipments.

He declined to identify them, but some reports have linked France and Portugal to arms deliveries to Iran.

"It seems clear that those other countries that were engaged in shipments to Iran felt, some of them at least — Israel particularly — felt they were doing the wishes of the United States," Mr. Wright said. In addition, "there are some other countries that shipped arms to Iran that may not really have questioned whether the United States approved it."

Mr. Wright said that nearly half the anti-tank missile components were shipped from San Antonio, Texas, earlier this year but he did not elaborate on how, or by whom, the weapons were transported to Iran. He did say that the weapons were paid for by Iran through a Swiss bank account.

Sen. David Durenberger, R-Minn., chairman of the Senate intelligence panel, said yesterday that

the entire Iran operation had actually been under way since early in the Reagan administration.

He said the planning and execution of the arms shipments involving administration officials went on for "a minimum of 18 months" but related actions by "other parties" showed that the operation "is as old as this administration."

Much of the discussion during the closed-door meetings yesterday centered on the administration's refusal to tell congressional panels charged with oversight of covert operations about the Iran dealings until they were reported in the press.

"Hell hath no fury like a congress-

sional committee scorned," commented Representative Robert McEwen, R-Ohio, a member of the House intelligence panel.

Mr. Leahy said that the administration "gave notice [to Congress] only after their new friends in Tehran leaked it to the press."

"They [administration officials] were willing to trust the lives of American hostages to fanatics and at least radicals in Iran and were not willing to trust the American people and Congress," Mr. Durenberger said.

In a letter sent to President Reagan after yesterday's briefings, Mr. Durenberger and Mr. Leahy said that there were still unanswered questions about the operation — in-

cluding "how the arms transactions in 1985 came about [and] what they contained" — and that "Mr. Casey and Mr. Poindexter are themselves still engaged in piecing together the full record of this operation."

"It's like pulling teeth to get answers," Mr. Leahy told reporters. "I think we're about to become journeymen dentists."

Both the House and Senate panels plan to continue their inquiries and are expected to call other witnesses.

Despite friction between Mr. Casey and Congress in the past, members did not blame him personally for the failure to inform Congress since that decision had been made by Mr. Reagan.

"We did not ask [Mr. Casey] to come in wearing sackcloth and ashes and kiss our ring," Mr. Wright said. "I don't know that there is any point in badgering Mr. Casey when the problem lies higher up."

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William Casey, CIA director, leaves the Capitol after briefing intelligence panels.